

# THE NATURE OF INTERCULTURALITY IN DEVELOPMENT: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF RELATIONALITY

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## Abstract

*This article argues that Modernization as a development construct has ignored indigenous culture to a large extent within its paradigm of sustained economic growth. This multi-cultured globalized world with its dominant (western) monoculture of modernization has as cost to the developing world the continued dependency of the have-nots on the haves. Theology values development, as long as it is holistic and people-centered for it then speaks of a cultural fit, which in turn reflects respect for human dignity and self-worth. However, even culture has certain coerciveness. Hence, the relation between theology and culture will always exhibit a dialectical tension. The author argues for an epistemology of transformation, which is not posed as an alternative development strategy but as a Christian framework for looking at human and social change. A theology of transformation approach to development is better designed to develop an intercultural disposition energized by the kingdom values of God. The author is of the opinion that the best characteristic of Transformational Development Theology is its sense of hospitality – in that it is a theology of generosity, which poses a challenge as much as it requires a willingness to embrace the other, which is truly an approach of interculturality.*

**Keywords:** Modernisation, Culture, Multiculturalilty, Interculturality, Transformational Development Theology, Relationality, Hospitality

*Culture is how people structure their experience conceptually so that it can be transmitted as knowledge (information) from person to person and from generation to generation.*

Fuglesang, 1982

By posing modernization as the point of departure for my contribution in this consultation I intend to show that in the process of development as expounded by the developed countries the agents of development neglected and ignored the culture of the indigenous people in the developing countries. Against the background of this and related approaches I wish to depict the transformational development approach as a theological more inclusive holistic theory for development, which accommodates interculturality. Interculturality in turn, as a construct, provides a means for Theology to influence development with its Kingdom values and its Biblical anthropological principles of acknowledgement of the other and dignity of all human beings. Of special importance is its emphasis on interdependency and hospitality within the economy of God which lends it also to be critical of the coerciveness of culture with a view of transforming it for the common good of humankind.

### Culture in Development: Its Historic Past

Culture has always been a highly contested area in the development debate.<sup>1</sup> In the history of development, various approaches<sup>2</sup> have contributed to the understanding of development of which the Modernization approach (also called theory)<sup>3</sup> is the most dominant contemporary approach that we want to focus on in relation to culture. Since the modern industrial and technological era ushered in unparalleled economic growth and prosperity for the North, the idea of making its fruits available to the rest of the world has motivated governments, intergovernmental institutions, and private voluntary organizations. Modernization theorists sought to spread those fruits by attempting to replicate the Western process of industrialization and technological growth in other parts of the world as well. In the words of Francois Perroux, Modernization is the “combination of mutual and social changes of a people which enable them to increase, cumulatively and permanently, their total real production.”<sup>4</sup> Walt W Rostow in Bragg (1987:22) saw the process of development as a succession of natural stages from “traditional” to modern, in which societies develop from a backward stage through the evolutionary process until the “take off” into sustained economic growth. This process accelerates, according to the theory, through the transfer of knowledge, technology, and capital from the “advanced” to less-advanced nations... until it reaches the final stages of high production and mass consumption.

But the Modernization theory is flawed in several respects.<sup>5</sup>

- Modernization theorists assume that traditional (that is rural and agrarian) societies are in some absolute sense underdeveloped and that their values and institutions cause underdevelopment as well as express it. “Resistance to development” came to be a perjorative criticism of any non-Western society, as though the Western model of development were the *summum bonum* of human existence and those who declined to accept it were backward and too ignorant to accept it. Such attempts to define what is good merely against the standard of one’s own experience are the height of ethnocentrism. Is “progress” preferable to the adaptive patterns developed over centuries?
- Modernization theorists assume that their idea of development is an inevitable, unilinear process that operates naturally in every culture. They tend to assume that all traditional societies are alike, and they fail to explain the variations brought about by random change and by interaction between societies.<sup>6</sup> The theory that modernization naturally occurs in a series of stages likewise assumes that “developing” countries today are similar to the “developed” countries at an earlier stage of their growth and that they can therefore modernize in the same way.
- Modernization theory assumes that productivity equals development, and that large-scale capital-, energy-, and import-intensive systems are the most productive and thus the most developed. Benjamin Higgins in Bragg (1987:23) counters by saying that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Burkey, S 1993. *People First*. London: Zed Books; Chambers, R 1997. *Whose Reality Counts*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications. Carmen, R 1996. *Autonomous Development*. London: Zed Books; Bragg in Samuel, V and Sugden C 1987. *The Church in Response to Human Need*. Oxford: Regnum Books.

<sup>2</sup> The three other approaches – Dependency, Global Reformism, and Another Development – are either variations of Modernization or reactions to it.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Burkey, 1993: 27pp.

<sup>4</sup> In Bragg, 1987: 48.

<sup>5</sup> Bragg (1987: 23-25) mentions five flawed assumptions.

<sup>6</sup> This critique is based on Roxborough, Ian 1979. *Theories of Underdevelopment*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities.

“productivity is not development, but merely the possibility of development.” There is a qualitative aspect to development that productivity ignores.

What may be exported along with the Western ideal of modernization is universal alienation and industrial bondage. Indeed humanity can be reduced to a unit of production, *homo faber*, with all the anomie and alienation that goes with it. Human beings are multidimensional with the psychological need for dignity, self-esteem, freedom, and participation. To reduce them to mere producers and consumers is to assume that some basic materialism is the goal of life. Of course, meeting human material needs makes life possible, but as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows, it is not sufficient for human self-realization and actualization.

#### *What are the Unintended Results (the Social Cost) of Modernization?*

Tribal people are bearing the brunt of the accelerated pace of Third World modernization because their way of life is not tied into the money market, and therefore is considered unimportant. These so-called primitive people are jeopardized simply by where they live, for they often occupy land that is rich in resources and very desirable for developers.

Beyond the ethical and moral questions of the destruction and assimilation of such tribal peoples, the rest of the world also faces the permanent loss of their insights and knowledge about local wildlife, medicinal plants, and ecology. Barbara Bentley in Bragg (1987:26) contends that a plan of modernization that depends on overwhelming tribalism and native ways is “like destroying a library of information. If we get rid of these people we’re effectively destroying a part of ourselves.” Sadly, the loss of traditional values and whole cultures through the cultural imperialism of Westernization is increasing.

Modernization has provided a radical improvement for one-fourth of the world’s population. But the flaw in Modernization is the assumption that the only way to achieve more satisfying lives for the rest is through the exportation of Western values, goals, and lifestyles. It does not recognize its ethnocentric assumption and deleterious social costs. But perhaps the greatest cost of Modernization to the rest of the world is that it fosters – perhaps requires – the continued dependency of the have-nots on the haves, of the modernizing on the modernized. That in a word to me is the macro-level of the status quo – the multi-cultural globalized world with the dominant mono-culture of modernization.

#### **The New Insights from Interculturality**

Over and against this, we need to postulate the view that progress and social change result both from *independent discovery within a culture* and from *intercultural contact and the transfer of innovation*. All societies receive benefits from others and all depend (in the positive sense of the word) on others. No one, and certainly no society, is self-sufficient. The modernized countries have tended to assume that they alone have the key to success in social change and will generously use it to help the world “develop.” But they have forgotten that they too can learn from the poorer countries, especially in the area of cultural identity.

What are the new insights that interculturality brings into the development debate from a theological perspective?

In development studies the vision for humanity is its wellness and more so from a theological perspective where we are concerned with transformational development of humankind from a holistic integrated perspective from within the salvation of God for all humanity.

Development, if it is holistic and people-centered, speaks of a cultural fit. In other words, transformation must always be appropriate to the culture that is to be transformed to ensure wholeness and well-being.

The word “intercultural” is the most useful term to describe the dialogue which is taking place in development between theology and culture. Intercultural and cross-cultural theology is most often used to describe dialogue between different religions.<sup>7</sup> In this context we concentrate on the role of Christian religion within the context of development. “Multicultural” often emphasizes the heterogeneity of different ethnic groups in society. “Intercultural” emphasizes a relationality beyond relativism, while refusing the standardization inherent, for example, in much transnational corporate enterprise. The intercultural is closely related to the interdisciplinarity,<sup>8</sup> which can be pursued through many disciplines other than theology, but which in particular describes the very nature of Transformative Development Theology.<sup>9</sup> However, Christian theology, through its claim to be relevant to all human well-being, has particular reason to pursue an intercultural approach.<sup>10</sup>

### **Transformation Theology and its Impact on Culture in Development: Towards a Transformational Development Approach in Theology**

Transformation is a part of God’s continuing action in history to restore all creation to himself and to its rightful purpose and relationships. God intends that social structures reflect and promote justice, peace, sharing, and free participation for the well-being of all.

The idea of transformation is not posed as an alternative development strategy but as a Christian framework for looking at human and social change. As such, it contains a set of principles against which any theory of development may be measured.

When all the elements of Life Sustenance, Equity, Justice, Dignity and Self-Worth, Freedom, Participation, Reciprocity, Cultural Fit, Ecological Soundness, Hope, and Spiritual Transformation are present “development” becomes “transformation”. In a transferred sense, without these principles then, also interculturality as a mode of being (relationality) is empty and oppressive for it would have failed to establish genuine relationships within and amongst the cultures.

Transformational Development Theology is a theology of engagement by which it wants to establish and restore genuine relationships. This makes it clear that theology’s contribution does not just lie in application but also in interaction. It is not a control by a hegemonic network of doctrine, but participation, reciprocity and dialogue in which the course of the journey to be taken remains open in a partnership of genuine equality, each of the members has a duty to contribute as much of an original and particular input as

<sup>7</sup> Newlands, G 2004. *The Transformative Imagination. Rethinking Intercultural Theology*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

<sup>8</sup> Newlands, G 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Transformative Development Theology relates to the whole compendium of theological subjects, as well as to sociology, political science and economics. On the praxis side it relates equally well to Practical Theology as to the Managerial Sciences.

<sup>10</sup> Interculturality in development makes it clear that there is a need for pluralism – recognizing multiple causation, multiple objectives and multiple interventions. Chambers (1983) has pointed out the dangers in the tendency of both practitioners and academics towards partiality: they tend to concentrate on one or a few explanations and actions and ignore others in analyzing poverty. He defines pluralism in rural development as standing on three legs, the two cultures – academic and practical – joining together with a third, the culture of the rural people in a particular place, which is the true center of attention and of learning. Thus rural development provides a dimension of interculturality in the process of development for the benefit of the local people (cf. Dunn, G 1969. *Sodapax*. Geneva: WCC).

possible. This approach makes it clear that the biblical anthropology of equality before God forms the basis for the human relations in transformational development.

I think the best characteristic of Transformational Development Theology is its sense of hospitality – in that it is a theology of generosity (cf. Newlands, George 2004).

*Generosity* in a Christian context involves a commitment to giving, unconditionally and with an emphasis on those who are most in need. It also means an intellectual generosity, a willingness to look for the best interpretations of strange cultures and beliefs and to be open to learning from them. *Hospitality* embraces all that can be said of generosity, and underlines the need for *concrete interaction*. Hospitality involves the risk of inviting others into our own environment, and being prepared for reciprocal hospitality. It is a particular suitable metaphor for Christian theology, which has a dual focus on word and sacrament, on concept and embodiment. Like generosity, hospitality is not confined to one aspect of life. It does not only happen with material commitments, but also carries an intellectual dimension of hospitality. Hospitality is a concept and a reality vital to the flourishing of a humane society. It denotes a wide dimension of trust and openness. But it is not without limits. It indicates a texture of compassion and care which is not compatible with many aspects of human living – in violence, coercion and manipulation, in the systematic neglect of the marginalized, in triumphalist ideologies of every sort. With advocates of such values there will be dialogue but not agreement. In this sense hospitality is a challenge as much as a willingness to embrace. Hospitality may be strengthened by long tradition, but it is also a strategy which has inherent within it the constant possibility of surprise and of new beginning. Outcomes cannot always be predicted. A theology of hospitality is inevitably a theology of risk and theology at risk. That is also the essence of the Christian gospel (Newlands, 2004: vii-xi).

The relation between theology and culture will always exhibit a dialectical tension. Theology seeks to be self-critical, *and not to confuse its critical engagement with culture with a triumphalist perspective which is often itself no more than the reflection of a particular cultural reading of Christian faith*. It reflects on the scope and limitations of the language and imagery of its tradition. It seeks to criticize culture in society which is inherently coercive, contrary to the central elements of the gospel, and which has sometimes been echoed and reinforced by theology itself. There is no escape from absorption in a particular culture for human language and human activity. The task is to try to remain as self-aware and as critically constructive as possible. This is most likely to happen through conversation and dialogue.

This tradition cannot be faithful to its own best insights without radical renewal, which involves critique of past tradition, openness to quite different and often conflicting traditions, and input from fresh sources.

This brings me to an interesting ethnic phenomenon in the political and societal formation of South – Africa, viz. the socio-ethnographic formation of the Coloured people and their relation to the Khoi-khoi.

### **The Case of the Khoi-khoi Movement**

A case in point of a multicultural society with many ethnic traditions is the South African demographic situation within which the government is ardently promoting a culture of national unity given our racially divided past. Within this society we find the Coloureds who stem from the first-generation South Africans, namely the Khoi-Khoi, and who are the product of miscegenation between Europeans and Africans, as well as Asians. They have departed from their old culture in that they have been coerced into adopting the European-

colonial South African ways of the settlers and of the missionaries, which means they have given up or lost their ancestral ways. Yet, judged by the contemporary Khoi-movement in SA they have not, by choice, totally adopted Colonial settler culture and they want to retain some degree of their ancestral culture and identity. Thus the three questions they must ask and answer are: Which of our ancestral ways still have sufficient cultural value for us to keep them? Which of the European or traditional contextual ways do we want to or are we willing to adopt? How do we put the chosen elements of both cultures together in such a way that we can today define who we are culturally? And what do we want our children to have as a legacy from our decisions?<sup>11</sup>

In my opinion they have a much more positive chance to be critical of past traditions, open to different traditions and to be enriched by embodying an intercultural approach to the real life situation in South Africa. In the midst of this diversity of ethnicities the contemporary Khoi-khoi descendants, or Coloureds can play a catalytic role of bringing opposing sides together in tolerance and mutual respect for the sake of nation-building.

### Concluding Issues to be Considered

- In the SA-context we have many cultures in the one nation. The strategic question to ask is, is there a dominant culture? It appears that the nation-building talk is an attempt by government to create a new national post-apartheid dominant Black<sup>12</sup> culture! What are the challenges for interculturality between a perceived politically driven dominant Pan- Africanist black culture in competition with a colonized Coloured culture and the euro-centric White culture. Already we find Coloured people complaining of the fact that they are not black enough. Another equally important issue is the social position of the sub-cultures within the tribal units?
- This brings me to the issue of Human Rights, with the focus not so much on an academic or legal study of human rights. Rather the emphasis is on the formation of a human rights culture, in the words of Conradie (2003: 311),<sup>13</sup> “on issues of moral formation, on the realization that the formulation of a bill of rights does not guarantee a society in which such rights will be respected.” An understanding of and the critical element build into interculturality will greatly assist to create in people a sense of tolerance, self-critique and hospitality so that the rational element of human rights can come into its own in the South African society by people that embody and practice the spirit and the vision of the constitution.
- All people are interdependent, but what about a status quo interdependence in which the dominant culture does not respect the other cultures and does not treat people from the other cultures with respect and as people with dignity and self-worth? This was the case for ages under colonialism. But this was not only the case under colonialism; it was also true with cultural dichotomy of superior versus subordinate ethnic groups in the whole history on the continent of Africa and elsewhere. Too many examples abound!
- Globalization and neo-liberal capitalism also force interculturality but then the issue of the relationship between this new formed interculturality and the present traditional cultures and lifestyles becomes important for human dignity, value and quality of

<sup>11</sup> cf. Ukaga, Okechukwa and Maser. Chris 2004. *Evaluating Sustainable Development*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

<sup>12</sup> Black not meant in a socio-political sense as inclusive of all historically disadvantaged people in South Africa, but exclusively denoting Bantu-speaking people.

<sup>13</sup> Conradie, EM, 2003 in Sporre K & Botman, HR (eds.), 2003, *Building a Human Rights Culture*, Falun: Högskolan Dalarna (311-333).

existence. Will these global forces bring about a disregard for the homebrewed cultures and quality of life? Branding and brand-names have a huge impact in the sphere of trade with clothing and other commodities. How can fashion, which aims at lending taste and flair within the esthetic sphere, and modernization, by means of technology, which in turn aims at improving human existence, be sensibly integrated? Already globalization threatens to marginalize even the industries and manufacturing of certain countries, in other words the economic activity of people, the very bread and butter issues. China's clothing industry has become a major threat to the industry in the Western Cape because of trade agreements between governments and the favorable import tariffs. Interculturality, within globalization with its neo-liberal capitalism has therefore the danger of encroaching upon the natural life space and in the process rendering people vulnerable for exploitation.

- The unity of humankind as an interculturality activity is important for the human race on earth and its coexistence and survival. Fundamentalism on earth within Christianity and Moslems has been the cause of much strife and violence. It is important to overcome cultural, political, and economic barriers to meaningful participation in development planning in order to ensure quality of life (cf. Mompati and Prinsen in Eade, 2002: 94<sup>14</sup>).
- Interculturality can also deal with culture as resistance to change and lack of modern outlook (cf. Burkey, 1993:7). For sure not everything in culture is good for human, economic, social and political development. Many elements may stifle even human (personal) development. Humankind needs cultural diversity for its survival. We do not need a 'clash of civilizations' we need to relate to others in a spirit of joyful interest and compassionate love (cf. Verhelst, T and Tyndale, W in Eade, 2002: 22<sup>15</sup>). This is a truly theological transformational perspective on development (cf. John 3: 16; I John 2: 9-11).

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<sup>14</sup> Eade, D (ed.) 2002. *Development and Culture*. Oxford: Oxfam.

<sup>15</sup> Eade, D (ed.) 2002.